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A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT THE
ASSIZES held at LANCASTER,
The Eleventh Day of AUGUST, 1771,
BEFORE THE
Honourable Sir HENRY GOULD, Knt.
ONE OF HIS
MAJESTY'S JUSTICES
OF THE
COURT OF COMMON-PLEAS;
The Honourable EDWARD WILLES,
ONE OF HIS
MAJESTY'S JUSTICES
OF THE
COURT OF KING'S-BENCH;
The HIGH-SHERIFF and GRAND JURY.

By the Rev. JOHN LEVER,
Curate of Buxton, and Chaplain to the High-Sheriff
of Lancashire.

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GENTLEMEN,

TRULY sensible of the high Honour conferred upon me, by the Request that I would publish the following Sermon, I take the earliest Opportunity of complying with your Desire, and beg Leave to subscribe myself

Your most obliged,

And obedient humble Servant,

JOHN LEVER.

Prophecy of Amos, 4th Chap. Part of 12th Ver.

Prepare to meet thy God.

“ **T**HAT there is a God above, all Nature
“ cries aloud, through all her Works: The
“ Heavens declare his Glory, and the Fir-
“ mament sheweth his Handy-work;” The atten-
tive Mind observes the divine Providence conspicu-
ous in every part of the Creation: Wrapt up in
Wonder and Delight, when she beholds the Vault
of Heaven thick set with Stars,—the Planets per-
forming their annual, and diurnal Courses, regu-
lar, and harmonic, she is convinced that there must
be an Almighty, and infinitely wise Being, who placed
them in their several Spheres, and “ set them their
“ Bounds which they cannot pass.” If she descends
and fixes her Thoughts upon this Earth, she will
be equally astonished with the Systems of the ve-
getable and animal Part of the Creation. “ Every
“ Tree, Plant, and Flower,—every Animal, and the
“ minuteſt Inſect, proclaim a preſent Deity; who
B “ wrought

“ wrought them out of the rude Mass of Matter,
 “ inspired their various Degrees of Life, and con-
 “ ducts them through the several Stages from their
 “ Birth to their Dissolution:” Let her survey the
 human Body, and her Wonder will still increase;
 and lastly, let her reflect upon herself, upon her
 own Capacity, Sense, and Reason, and she will find
 a Monitor within, whose conscious Feelings will
 confirm her Opinion, that blind, and uncertain
 Chance could not possibly have perfected this won-
 derful and amazing Work; but that there must be
 an all-wise, almighty Creator, who for the noblest
 Purposes formed the human Frame, and by fixing
 in it the intellectual Faculties, stamped it with his
 own Image, and made it to bear a Resemblance to
 himself.

Thus far our Reason, and the Light of Nature
 lead us. Thus far the Philosophers of old attain-
 ed, but the Events of human Life perplexed and
 astonished them, confounded their Ideas, and led
 them into such a Labyrinth of Uncertainty, as they
 could not unravel. For if there was an all-wise,
 and

and Almighty Ruler, they could not comprehend that he would suffer, what they frequently saw happen, the vicious Man triumphant in his villanous Designs, committing all manner of Sin and Wickedness, not only with Impunity, but to all outward Appearance, with the most flattering Success; and the virtuous, honest Man, poor and oppressed, despised, forsaken, and abandoned by his Friends, to every Species of the most tormenting Distress. I say, this they could not reconcile to their Idea of a powerful, and just, and merciful Governor of the World. Here they were puzzled with Mazes, and perplexed with Doubts, "till the Sun of Righteousness arose, with healing in his Wings," and by the Brightness of his Appearance, dispelled the thick Clouds and Mists of Ignorance and Error, revealed to us the true Religion, and "justified the Ways of God to Man." The blessed Jesus brought "Life and Immortality to Light through the Gospel." He taught us, that there must be a future Reckoning made; that when this great Globe, and all that it inhabit are dissolved, there will be a final Day of Account,—a solemn Enquiry into the good

and bad Actions of Mankind in general, and that every one in particular, must be answerable for the Things done in his Body, “ whether they are good “ or whether they are bad,” and that there will be a State of everlasting Retribution to reward the Good, and punish the Wicked. The poor distressed Mourner, who wandered through the dreary, and inhospitable Wilds of an unpitying, unfeeling World, shall then receive the Reward of his Integrity, his Resignation, his Patience; and with joy unspeakable, shall hear his Judge, in Sounds extatic, salute him with “ well done, good, and faithful Servant, enter thou into the Joy of thy Lord,” whilst the haughty Tyrant, who triumphed here in his Wickedness, who, clothed in purple and fine Linen, and faring sumptuously every Day, withheld his Protection, his Assistance from the Poor and Needy; and who neglected the Commands of his Saviour dying for him, dying to give him an Opportunity, through his Merits, of rescuing himself by true Repentance, and amendment of Life, from that terrible and dreadful State, to which his abandoned and wicked Life exposed him. This Wretch,
with

with horror inconceivable, must hear the dreadful Sentence of Condemnation from his powerful, and to him, terrible Judge.

To such an Audience, as I am now addressing, I will not suppose it necessary to dwell longer upon this Subject. I will presume, that you are not only nominally, but really, and truly Christians indeed; that your Faith is established, that you do assent to the Tenets of the Religion you profess, and are convinced, that there is a God, who presides over the Kingdoms of this Earth, and to whom you are to be accountable for your Behaviour in this Life. And if this be the Case, it cannot be improper to remind you to “prepare to meet your God.” Nor do I think it at all unreasonable to do it, on this present Occasion, when we are assembled to perform the Offices of our several Stations, for the Furtherance of true Justice and Religion. It is certainly right, when it may be of Advantage to us, to compare great Things with smaller. Therefore let those who attend the Courts of Justice, either on Account of Business or Curiosity,

fity, make it of real Service to themselves, by suffering the Solemnity of them to impress their Minds, with the awful Thoughts of the last tremendous Day of the Lord. When we see the poor affrighted Wretch called up to the Bar, to answer to the heavy Charge brought against him; pale Horror, and the most dreadful Anxiety painted in his Countenance, perhaps his guilty Conscience giving the Lie to his Words when he pleads not guilty; I say, when we view this affecting Scene, let us remember, that we must one Day appear before the Bar of an higher and more tremendous Tribunal; and that we shall there be deprived of the only Hope, which the Criminal here, if guilty, can form in his Breast, that the Evidence will not be sufficient to prove his Guilt. But at the last Day, when the Secrets of all Hearts shall be disclosed, no well-concerted Scheme of Privacy, no artful Disguise will there avail us any Thing; there will be no shuffling, no trifling, but our Offences will appear in open View, and the very Intentions of our Hearts be exposed in the Sight of Angels and of Men.

When

When the guilty Criminal is brought up to the Bar to receive the Sentence of Condemnation solemnly pronounced upon him by the Judge, every Spectator, who is not void of Sensibility, must be struck with Awe and Seriousness. Let not this be lost upon us, let not the Thought escape us, how terrible must be the Situation of that Wretch, who is to receive the Sentence of everlasting Condemnation from the great Judge of quick and dead!

Humanity inspires us with painful Feelings, upon seeing the Malefactor condemned to atone for his Offences, with the Loss of his Life. Whilst we detest the Crime, we cannot but pity the Man, and mourn over the Depravity of human Nature, which can be brought to commit such Crimes as expose it to this Punishment. But how happy is this Criminal in having Time allowed by real, and sincere Repentance to wash away his Guilt, and to "prepare to meet his God." Whereas, at the last, the final Day of Account, there will be no Time for Repentance, no possibility of reversing, or alleviating the Weight of the Punishment which shall

shall be fixed upon us by the Almighty Judge. Therefore let us, whilst we have Time, “ prepare “ to meet our God,” and in earnest set about this great Work, lest, whilst we are wavering and forming distant Purposes, the keen Dart of Death should overtake us, Opportunity slip out of our Hands, and be lost for ever. The shortness of human Life, and the uncertainty of its Period, should be the most powerful Arguments to hasten this Preparation. The frequent Instances which we meet with, of some of our Fellow-Creatures being suddenly called to their Account by divers Diseases, and the most unaccountable Accidents, should make us set about this great Work, and prepare for our latter End.

The strongest and best Constitution is so far from being a Security, that we often see the Possessor of it, snatched away by the sudden Stroke of an Apoplexy, or a thousand other Disorders. We have lately had a mournful Proof of this, in the sudden Death of a valuable Man, who filled one of the highest Stations worthily and well, whose
Abilities

Abilities were equalled only by his Integrity, his anxious Care, and indefatigable Industry in every Business which could promote the good of his Country. The Public in general, this County in particular, must severely feel and lament his Loss.

Let not my Gratitude which prompts me to speak this, be misconstrued. Let not what my Heart dictates be called fulsome Flattery. It is a just Tribute due from me, to the Memory of my deceased Friend. But, O God! thy Will be done.

To return, " The rejoicing Spirits of manly Vigour, the exulting Hope, the enchanting Prospect shall in a few, may, in a very few Years be extinguished in the dark Mansions of the Grave; every fair Form, that is now animated with lively Sense and sprightly Fancy, shall soon be mouldered in the common Dust, senseless and forgotten, through a Series of Ages." Perhaps, ere this sacred Place is again filled with the pious and devout Worshippers of their God, perhaps before this Evening's Sun shall set, the Tongue which

is now speaking, may be hushed in everlasting Silence, " some Ear that is listening to these Observations may be closed in Insensibility." How necessary then is it to prepare for this awful Event!

The best Preparations for Death are a virtuous Temper, and a good Life. To attain these, we must study the Doctrines and Example of our divine Master, the blessed Jesus. He has given us Rules for our Behaviour, in every different Situation of Life, and he has shewed us the practicability of his Precepts by his own divine Example. The Religion which our Saviour came into the World to promulgate, is as equally adapted to make this Life comfortable and agreeable, as to insure to us the Blessings of hereafter. The angelic Heralds proclaimed at once the glad Tidings of his Arrival, and the benevolent Intent of his coming. The heavenly Choir in Sounds Celestial, saluting the ravished Ears of the wondering Shepherds with, " Glory to God in the Highest, on Earth Peace, Good-will towards Men." The divine Intent of our Saviour's coming was to rescue Man from
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the Bondage of Sin, by his Atonement to satisfy the offended Justice of God, to make us happy here, and Heirs of everlasting Life in the World to come. He cleared up the Doubts and Uncertainties in which the World was then involved, took off the Veil, and instead of the Ceremonies of the Jewish Institution, established a Religion founded on plain rational Principles, demonstrable to every Observer, and so clear, that he who runs may read, and understand too, if he will divest himself of Prejudice and Partiality. Let us cast our Eyes attentively and seriously upon the Precepts of the Gospel, and we shall be convinced that they are not only easy in the Practice, but likewise calculated to promote our Felicity in this Life, as well as in the World to come.—He taught us, that we should entertain just Notions of the Deity and of his Attributes. Filled with religious Awe by the Consideration of his infinite Wisdom, Omniscience, Omnipresence, Justice and Power; and warmed with Sentiments of the liveliest Gratitude and Love, when we consider his darling Attribute, his Mercy, which adds a Lustre to Omni-

potence itself, and which every Day produces some Instances of to us all. From these Sentiments must spring Devotion unaffected and sincere, Devotion inspired by Love and Gratitude, which will make our Prayers and Praises a willing Sacrifice, and render them acceptable in the Sight of God. For unless the Heart is really and truly concerned and warmed with this holy Flame, the affectation of Sanctity will signify nothing. All outward Professions and Forms will rather turn to our Condemnation in his Sight, who requireth Truth in the inward Parts. The wanton Eye, seized with some sudden Emotion, may drop the Tear of Penitence; the Conscience of the most abandoned Wretch, may awaken him with a sudden Pang, and make him cry out, " God be merciful to me " a Sinner!" But this, or any other outward Appearance of Repentance, will not avail us any Thing, unless it produces Amendment of Life. True Repentance consisteth not in mortified and melancholy Appearances, but in an Alteration of our Conduct and Behaviour; it is the Heart which must be affected, and this must be proved by the Actions.

This

This is the Repentance which our Redeemer prescribed to us, as necessary to our Acceptance into God's Favour, an hearty Sorrow for what we have done amiss, and a well-founded Resolution to walk for the future in Amendment of Life. If we are satisfied that this is our Case, he teaches us with all Humility to hope for the Favour of God, which we are to implore by sincere and hearty Prayer, firmly believing, that, through the Merits of our Saviour, we shall receive the divine Grace and Assistance: And surely there is no great Difficulty in performing these Duties, nothing repugnant to human Nature, or inconsistent with true Pleasure in it. Let gloomy Enthusiasts paint Religion in Frowns, and recommend a moroseness and austerity of Behaviour, which must cover its Disciples with a perpetual Gloom, and agitate the Breast with Sighs and Groans; this cannot be a true Picture of the Religion which the God of Love prescribed to his Creatures, and which the Son of God, who is Love itself, came into the World to promulgate.

Let

Let us now take a short View of the Behaviour which the Religion of Jesus requires of us with Regard to our Fellow-Creatures. We are taught by this Religion to be kindly affectioned one towards another, forgiving, compassionate and benevolent. Let our Imagination present to us a World, inhabited by rational Creatures, who really acted upon these Principles, and we shall be in Raptures with the Idea of that Harmony, Peace and Pleasure, which would reign in it. For was the Benevolence which our Lord recommended, duly practised, how very different would be the Face of Society? Free from the baleful Influence of Malice and of Envy, those horrid corroding Passions, we should see the Smile of Brotherly-Love upon every Countenance, each one rejoicing in the Welfare of his Neighbour, and endeavouring to relieve the Distress of his sorrowing afflicted Brethren. Was the Charity prescribed by the Gospel universally practised, the poor distressed Mourner would not wander long in sorrow's Path, but would be sure, soon to meet with the good Samaritan, who would pour the Balm of Comfort

Comfort into his Wounds, soften his Distress, powerfully assist him to struggle nobly with his Misfortunes, and if he could not entirely relieve them, would greatly alleviate the Weight of the painful Burden.

Religion viewed in this Light, must attract the Admiration and Love of all her Beholders, for these "her Ways are Ways of Pleasantness, and all her Paths are Peace." The Satisfaction experienced by the poor Wretch who is relieved from Misery and Distress, recoils with the most pleasing Force upon the Breast of the Benefactor, and gives him a Delight which Language cannot describe, unknown to, and not to be conceived by the sordid Wretch, "hard and unfeeling of another's Woe," whose Heart wrapped up in itself, and only anxious to gratify its own covetous Desires, knows none of those sweet Emotions of Soul, which constitute the most delicate of all Pleasures, that of conferring Ease and Comfort upon the distressed. That the feelings of a benevolent Heart, are in themselves a sufficient Reward for a generous Action,

tion, I dare appeal to any of you my Hearers, who have indulged yourselves in this most delightful of all Practices, who in the Performance of this Duty, have heard the lisping Tongue of Infants in artless Sounds rejoicing, thank you; have seen the melting Eye of the ravished Parent, unexpectedly relieved by your Bounty, pay the Tribute of a Tear, to ease the Heart, overcome with Excess of Gratitude, which deprives the Tongue of its Office.

These are the delightful Effects of the Temper which the Religion of the blessed Jesus will inspire us with;—these are the Works which that Temper will produce; an ardent and grateful Love of God, which will be expressed by frequent and sincere Instances of private Devotion, by a regular, but not superstitious observance of religious Solemnities; and above all, by a constant Obedience to the divine Law, and a calm Resignation of ourselves to the Disposal of Heaven; while with Regard to our Fellow-Creatures, we shall be benevolent and charitable. These are not the only Virtues which our Religion

Religion inculcates as necessary to our Salvation, but they necessarily lead to all the rest, and the truly benevolent and charitable Heart cannot harbour the malignant Passions, nor be guilty of Vices which must spring from Pride, Envy, Malice, Hatred or Revenge. Therefore, let us seriously examine our Hearts, whether we are possessed of this Temper, and whether we manifest our Sincerity by the Practice of these Duties; whether we have a real and sincere Love for our God, and a true Regard for our Fellow-Creatures; in short, whether we are true Disciples of the Religion we profess, and merit the honourable Name of Christians. For if this is the Case, we are certainly “ prepared “ to meet our God,” and need not be under any Apprehensions of being called to our Account either by a sudden Death, or by a lingering Disease. Wherefore, in the Words of an elegant and noble Author, “ O fear the Lord all the Days of thy Life, “ and walk in the Paths which he hath opened “ before thee. Let Prudence admonish thee, let “ Temperance restrain; let Justice guide thy Hand, “ Benevolence warm thy Heart, and Gratitude to
D “ Heaven

" Heaven inspire thee with Devotion. These shall
 " give thee Happiness in thy present State, and
 " bring thee to the Mansions of eternal Felicity in
 " the Paradise of God." That this may be the
 happy Lot of us all, O God of thy infinite Mercy
 grant, through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom
 with thee and the Holy Spirit, be ascribed all
 Adoration and Praise, now and for evermore.
 Amen.

F I N I S.



